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The Effect of Pets and Nature on Environmental Identity and Connection to Animals

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The Effect of Animals on Connection to the Environment

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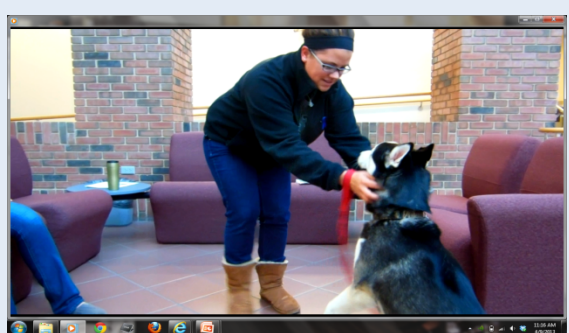



Introduction

Because we are facing a multitude of environmental issues, it is vital to discover how to strengthen human connections with nature (Koger & Winter, 2010). Previous research has found that exposure to nature--whether through time spent in natural settings or through exposure to animals--is associated with increased identification with nature and pro-environmental behaviors (Myers & Saunders, 2002; Paul & Serpell, 1993; Vining, 2003). The goal of this study were to

- replicate findings that childhood pet ownership is positively correlated with environmental identity
- determine whether connection to nature could be manipulated through exposure to an animal and/or the outdoors

Method

- Participants
 - 138 undergraduate students
 - **83.3% owned pets**
- Procedure:
 - Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in an online study.

	Inside	Outside
Animal present		
Animal absent		

- After viewing one of four brief videos, participants completed the measures.

Method

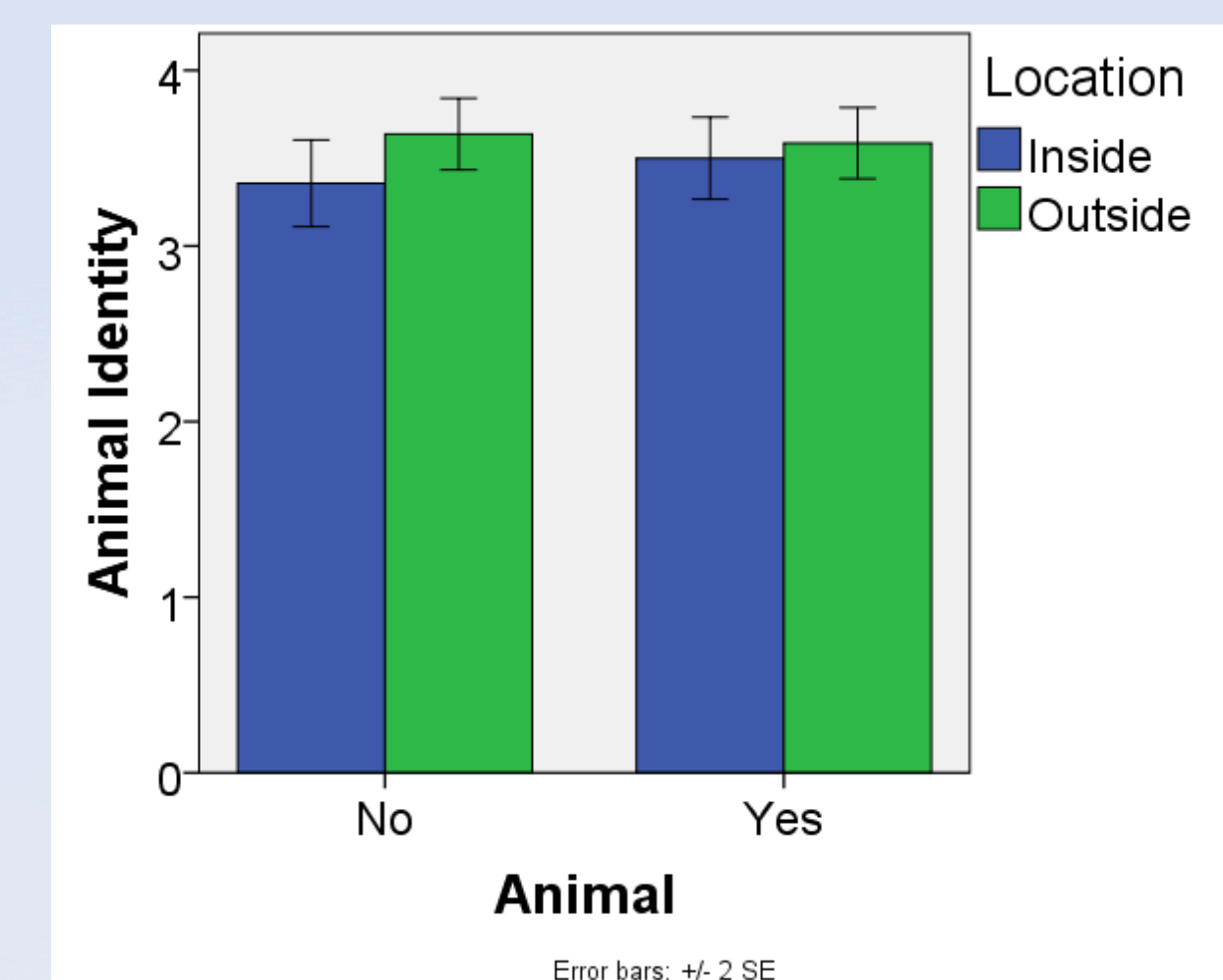
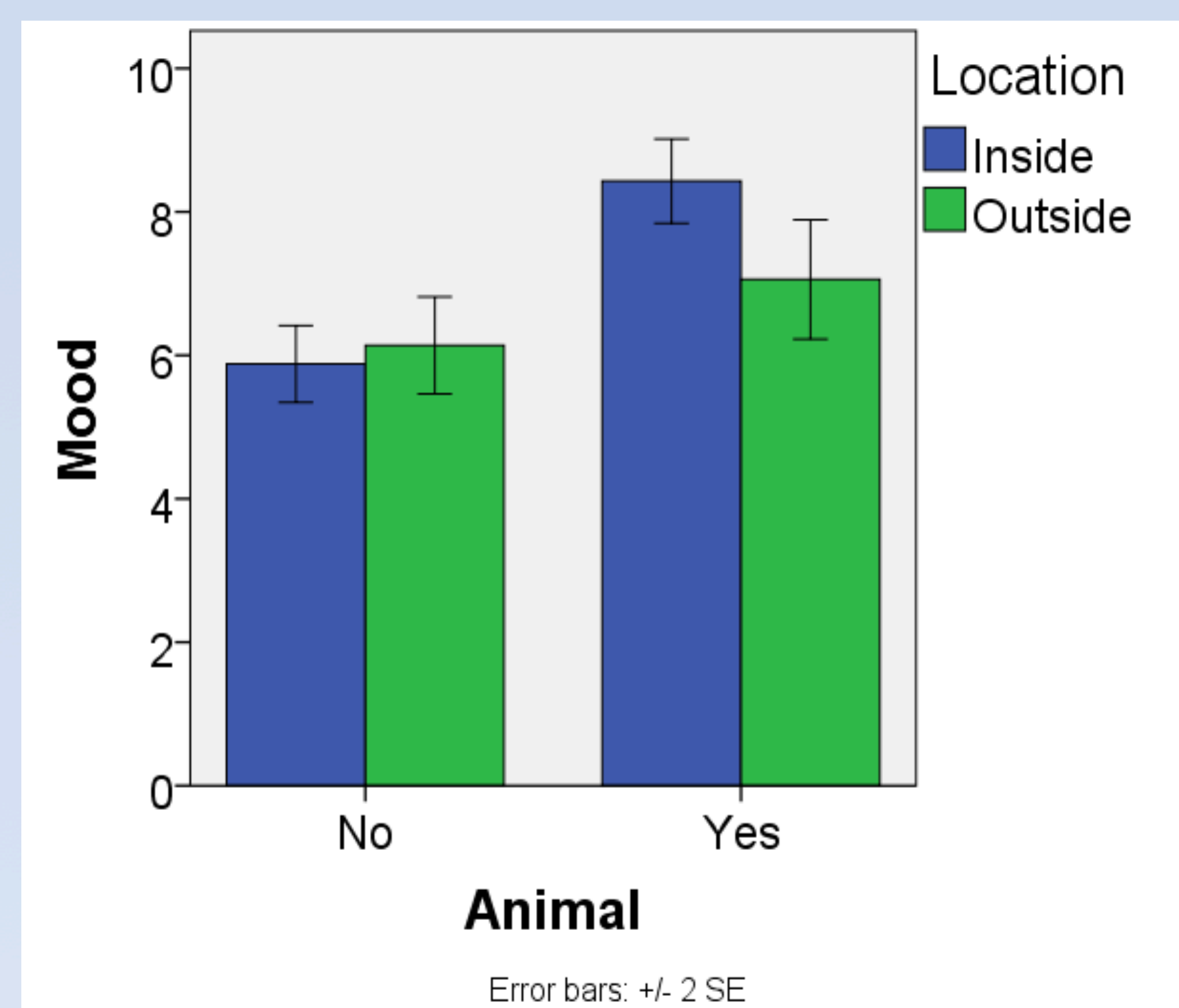
• Measures:

- **Mood**: scale ranging from 1-10, 1=much worse, 10=much better
- **Environmental Identity Scale** (EID; Clayton, 2003) $\alpha = .92$
- **Animal Connectedness Scale** (ACS) created by the research team, modeled after the EID. $\alpha = .91$

Results

Scale	Had pet as child	Did not own pet	t(132)
EID	3.38 (.55)	2.88 (.70)	3.59**
ACS	3.62 (.60)	3.08 (.77)	3.55**

** $p < .01$



Discussion

- Results support our hypotheses that people who owned pets during childhood would:
 - Report higher environmental identity
 - Report greater connectedness to animals
- Experimental manipulations yielded:
 - significant effects for mood
 - Overall, the presence of an animal led to a greater increase in mood
 - The animal had a greater effect inside compared with outside
 - No significant impact for location
 - No significant effects for location or animal for neither environmental identity nor connectedness to animals.
- Interpretation
 - Animals have a positive effect on people
 - Childhood experiences may have long-lasting consequences with animals playing a role in EID and connectedness to animals
 - Animals may have a positive short-term effect on mood
 - Why didn't location have an impact?
 - Demographics
 - EID measure – trait versus state
 - Differences between videos
 - Video versus true interaction
 - Videos were brief
- Future research:
 - Ensure equivalency across videos (e.g. film on green screen)
 - True interaction versus video

References: Hills, 1995; Jerolmack, 2003; Koger & Winter, 2010; Kruse, 1993; Myers & Saunders, 2002; Myers, Saunders, & Garrett, 2004; Paul & Serpell, 1993; Vining, 2003